

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5

DATE: April 18, 1990

SUBJECT: Trip report; Himco Dump site; Marion, IN; 4/2-3/90

FROM: Karen Martin, Community Relations Coordinator

TO: Toni Lesser, Chief
Superfund Community Relations Section

Peter Carr, Donohue, and I drove to Elkhart Monday a.m., April 2 to conduct community interviews on April 2 & 3.

On 4/2 we met Robert Watkins, Director of Environmental Health, Elkhart County (Tom Wilson, Director of Environmental Safety, did not show up for our appointment); residents Mr. & Mrs. Rumfelt, Selma Bowers and granddaughter and Mr. and Mrs. Klein; residents Helen Kolanowski, son Charles Smith and daughter-in-law Sue Smith and 3 grandchildren; and residents Nita Smith and son Randy. All these residents live contiguous to and on the south side of the site. On April 3 we met with Elkhart Mayor James Perron and City Engineer Gary Gilot; and residents Raymond Brown and Dorothy Crisp, who live east of the site across the Nappanee Road Extension.

Bob Watkins had very little knowledge about the site or community concerns. He had not visited the site or residents and was not sure exactly where the site is. He had not reviewed site-related documents before our visit. He indicated he had been on the job only six months and had lost a lot of staff. He reviewed documents pertaining to another concern while we were in the office with him.

Watkins told us he was aware that citizens near the site wanted their groundwater tested. He informed us a groundwater protection ordinance had been adopted about one year ago and implemented approximately six months ago.

He mentioned that Elkhart residents also want to know more about the Conrail site (another NPL site in Elkhart).

Several residents met with us in Patricia Rumfelt's home. They shared much of the information that has been shared over the years with Bob Lance, RPM, and through the lawsuit the Rumfelts and some neighbors brought against Miles Laboratories (the Rumfelts settled; other neighbors dropped out due to cost; terms of the settlement may not be disclosed). Pictures, horror stories about current water quality, sitings of illegal dumpings, concerns about government officials' lack of responsiveness to their concerns, etc. were shared.

Mrs. Klein informed us she and her husband had purchased their home from the Elwells 8 months ago. She said she had asked their real estate agent about water quality and told there was no problem. (They want to know if EPA attorneys can tell them what they can do about this. They want to know if it should have been disclosed.) After moving in and discovering the problems with water she said she contacted officials at the ISBH, Elkhart City Water Works, the Mayor of Elkhart, the City Planning Commission, Miles Labs, private lab techs and U.S. EPA. She said she felt she got the runaround from everyone (the City saying they're outside City limits and there's nothing the City can do) except U.S. EPA. She said Art Gasior wrote a letter telling her about the Himco dump, that it is on the NPL, new wells are being dug and explaining what's being done re: the site. Bob Lance sent more information.

Mrs. Klein asked me to let her know the answers to the following questions:

1. What chemicals are in their water?
2. Can they be absorbed through the skin?
3. Can they cause illnesses?
4. If they can cause illnesses, what symptoms should they be looking for?

Several residents expressed their belief that Indiana state and Elkhart County officials are fully aware of the quality of the water and continue to tell residents the water is safe because Miles Labs and other business concerns are too strong and have got everyone who could effect any change "hushed up."

They reported unusual illnesses and skin rashes. Mr. Rumpfelt had a case of meningitis which, they reported, was caused by something "water related." But, they said, the doctor would not report it as such when he learned of the Himco dump and Miles' involvement.

The biggest concern, reiterated many times throughout the session, is water quality. They have been told it is safe by "officials." Yet it is brown, has been known to foam, smells terrible, and is reported to cause appliances to deteriorate and ruin plumbing. They want City water, which stops approximately 1/4 block from their homes, and have been told they cannot get it, except at great cost.

They also expressed concern that the site isn't fenced. They reported kids sometimes play on it (some of their children used to find hypodermics and other medical waste there) and fish in the on-site pond.

We met with the Kolanowskis separately. They shared similar frustrations with government officials they have contacted. They feel they have gotten the "runaround" from everyone they have talked to. They, too, feel Miles has "hushed up" everyone, including the media. We were told the TV program "60 Minutes" declined to investigate the story because Miles is one of their largest sponsors. (I asked for a copy of the letter stating that; they said they will send it if they can find it.)

They reported many unusual illnesses and skin irritations among family members. Mr. Kolanowski died of cancer after reportedly drinking well water, which he drank even while the rest of his family drank bottled water. Mr. Kolanowski told us a doctor told her Mr. Kolanowski's cancer was caused by the contaminated water but the doctor reportedly refused to testify to that. They reported that a dentist would say that a neighbor child's loss of tooth enamel was water contamination related but also refused to testify.

The Kolanowskis hired independent chemists to test their water. They reported being told their water is not up to sewage standards.

Their biggest concerns are to get City water and to stop getting the runaround from those they feel are there to protect them.

All residents interviewed up to this time also reported that their gardens won't grow and that several healthy trees have died recently. Charles Smith said his fish died when he put tap water in their tank.

The Kolanowskis emphasized they believe EPA can put pressure where needed so that residents can get City water. They believe a new industrial building being built across the street is getting City water. They want to know where the plant's waste will go.

Residents are very concerned that Indiana officials hear their concerns. They also want to know how long it will take to get some action.

We next met with Nita Smith and her son Randy. They live south and slightly west of the site. They report no water problems. Randy rides his dirt bike on the site and has noticed 2 unusual holes on the site. We advised him to not go on the site.

We met with Kenny & Ruth Bemiller (residents of a farm south of town, next to Himes' new dump facility), Lorna Rickard of CLEAN (Citizens League for Environmental Action Now) and Nickie Newcomer of POWER (People Organized for Water Purity and Environmental Responsibility) at the Bemiller's home on April 3. We asked about their organizations - when they were organized, who the members are, what their actions encompass, etc. They and the groups they represent seemed particularly concerned about Charles Himes' new dump on the south side of town. Their organizations want a lot of public input (suggesting a meeting per month) and information sharing.

We next met with Mayor James Perron and City Engineer Gary Gilot the morning of April 3. They explained the structure of Elkhart County government and expressed some frustration with it, especially with the 3-member Board of County Commissioners, which functions as the executive and legislative branches.

Gilot and Perron were aware the people outside of City limits feel "abandoned" and feel that the County Commissioners don't respond or go to bat for them.

Groundwater contamination in general is of concern to them as City officials. Mike Terlip, Water Works Manager, is concerned about Himco; he is afraid Himco will contaminate the Bower Street Well Field.

When I asked whether they had heard from the County Road 10 residents about annexing that portion to the City, they answered no, but indicated that annexation would be an easy thing to do. The Mayor said he had never heard from the residents about their desire for City water. Gilot called Terlip as we sat there to find out if they could get water. Gilot and Perron said getting water would be no problem. Residents would simply have to pay certain costs (reportedly \$6.90 per frontage foot, \$80-90 for hook-up to the water tap, their own plumbing costs, sod replacement costs, and the cost for capping their wells) which could run \$2,000-3,000.

When I asked if they knew where the contamination was coming from at Himco, the Mayor said he didn't know. Gilot reported Miles. They said they think the public doesn't know where the contamination is coming from.

They reiterated the mission of the City is to protect the health of its citizens. They felt a number one priority is to get the citizens City water.

They are concerned that the Bower Street Wellfield might soon get contaminated from the Himco plume. They are putting in another wellfield north of the airport and feel that someday they may have to shut down Bower Street.

We told them we would report to the Himco neighbors what was told us about getting City water.

We also mentioned the Klein's concern about not having information about the Superfund site and water quality problems disclosed to them when they bought the Elwell's property. The Mayor thought that non-disclosure might not be legal.

The residents we met with east of the site reported occasional problems with water quality and past problems with air quality (when the dump was operating). They did not express great concern about the Himco site. They did say they thought there were an unusual number of deaths due to cancer in their area.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS:

1. Research answers to Chris Klein's questions. (NOTE: As of 4/18/90 I have contacted Risk Assessment re: her questions about dermal absorption. I have talked with her about possible risk considering we don't know what is in their water. Also, I have called the Indiana Attorney General's office re: her real estate question. The AG office says they don't get involved in concerns of that sort. I will call them back to see if they can give me a recommendation on who the Kleins can contact re: their concerns.)
2. Inform citizens south of the site what was explained about getting City water. (NOTE: Done first week upon return from trip. Charles Smith reported being told by Terlip that the cost wasn't accurate, that it could cost \$80,000. See #3.)

3. Report to Bob Lance citizens' continuing concerns about water quality. (NOTE: As result of report, Lance approached Jack Barnette of Emergency Response. They are sending people out to test water quality. If certain contaminants are found, citizens can be hooked up to City water at our expense. If we cannot do this for them, I will re-contact Mayor Perron re: hooking up the citizens and try to get a clear picture of cost.)

cc: Bob Lance, RPM
Tom Nash, ORC
Judy Beck, ORA
Mary Canavan, ORA

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